



LAND OF ROOTS VERSUS SEA OF FINANCE

Posted on September 1, 2023 by Diego Fusaro



Today's society presents itself as "liquid," if not "aeriform," according to Berman's diagnosis of the modern dissolution of stable forms in the air. This depends eminently on the fact that in it there is no reality that can escape the quality that distinguishes liquids, which is the adaptability to the container that houses them and, therefore, the assumption of the forms that are conferred on them at any given moment.

Thus, Hegel characterizes water in the *Encyclopedia* (§ 284): "it has no singularity of being per se, and therefore has in itself no solidity (*Starrheit*) and determination (*Bestimmung*)." For this reason, having no figure of its own, it "receives the limitation of the figure only from without" and "outwardly seeks it." Its "peculiar state" is *Bestimmungslosigkeit*, the "lack of determination," which is what makes it intrinsically adaptive in a universal and undifferentiated sense.

[Bauman](#) is right when he states that "this age of ours excels in dismantling structures and liquefying models, every kind of structure and every kind of model, by chance and without warning." The aspect that, however, he fails to make explicit with due emphasis in his analysis is that this form is neither extemporaneous nor accidental.

On the contrary, it corresponds to the lines dictated by neoliberal policies and by the evolution of the flexible global market, to which everything is called upon to adapt. Because if this aspect is eliminated, only the effects are considered while overlooking the causes; and, for this very reason, the gaze is diverted from the class-based power relationship as the real basis for the liquefaction of ties and identities. The robust relationship that connects the superstructure of postmodern precariousness with the structure of globalized capital, flexible and centered on the figure of flow, is lost sight of.

In other words, we forget the fact that today the absolute flexibility of forms coexists dialectically with the absolute rigidity of the "container;" that is, with globalized capitalism in the anonymity of the liquid-financial markets, which seeks to make precariousness eternal and to make of itself an ineluctable destiny for the peoples of the planet. It sets itself up as the new global container, which gives shape to all the material and symbolic realities contained in it and previously transferred to the liquid state.

As our study [Essere senza tempo](#) (Bompiani, 2010) underlines, the total mobilization of entities, characteristic of the flexible mode of capitalist production, unfolds within the framework of the historical immobilism of a time that aspires to make precariousness an irreversible future: *plus ça*

change, plus c'est la même chose.

Its configuration is that of the Weberian steel cage with indestructible bars. Inside it, however, everything is possible; the possibilities being coextensive with respect to individual exchange value. Moreover, all values, identities and norms have been nihilistically "transvalued."

The metaphor of liquidity is indeed quite effective in highlighting the essence of flexible accumulation and of the society of fluid displacement of people (abstractly free to move and concretely obliged to do so) and of financial capitals in the absence of barriers and borders, "dissolved" and removed along with every "solid" and stable instance of the preceding dialectical and Fordist, proletarian and bourgeois structure. Such is the essence of what the hegemonic relation of force spreads in all senses as the "new categorical imperative: let us fluidify everything!"

Among the properties of water is also that omnipresence and that capacity to penetrate and invade all spaces, to break down all barriers and erode even the most solid rocks. They correspond perfectly to the characteristics of the universal flexibility of liquid-financial cosmo-marketing which, with reference to the post-Fordist era, has been defined as the end of organized capitalism.

Flexibility, having saturated every real and imaginary space, is indeed *aujourd'hui partout*. Water, conceived by Thales as the principle of being, becomes today the ἀρχή of capitalist reality, which renders everything liquid and invades every space, overrunning dykes and obstacles.

This dynamic can be illuminated by referring to the philosophical duo, Land and Sea, canonized by Schmitt and previously codified by Hegel, who asserts this in the lessons on *Weltgeschichte*:

"The most universal type of determination of nature, which has importance in history, is that constituted by the relationship between Sea and Land."

According to this heuristically fruitful analogy, the dynamics of the transnational market and global precariousness are, by definition, maritime.

The struggle between capitalist globalization and the national rootedness of peoples is, by the same

token, a clash between the maritime and the terrestrial elements, within the framework of the class conflict between the thalassic Lord and the telluric Servant. The terrestrial element of settlements and places, of roots and stabilities, is opposed to the maritime element of flows and homogeneous surfaces, of displacements and uprootings.

The thalassic Lord aspires to make liquid every solid element linked to the stability of the ethical, so that the being in its totality is redefined according to the liquid logic of market globalization; the openness of cosmopolitan capital figuratively coincides with the open and unlimited sea, with its homogeneous expansion, on which it is possible to navigate omnidirectionally; but then also with the peculiarity of the liquid element itself, which tends to saturate every space.

For his part, the "Glebalized" Servant must aspire, instead, to resist this dynamic, imposing the primacy of the telluric dimension of rootedness and borders as walls against deterritorialization, the mobilization of beings and globalist omni-homogenization: unlike the sea, whose essence lies in that flowing by virtue of which—Heraclitus would say—"always different waters flow" (ἕτερα καὶ ἕτερα ὕδατα ἐπιρρεῖ), the earth is the plurality of stable and localized spaces. It is traversed by boundaries and differences, by borders and walls.

The Nomos of the earth represents the concrete space of the plurality of peoples and of their possibility of giving themselves a law and a history, living permanently, according to that figure of the roots that accompanies the image of the terroir. The intercontinental migratory flows are opposed to the rooted stability of the peoples, just as the flows of liquid-financial capital mark an antithesis with respect to the work of the solidary community in its circumscribed spaces and in its equitable sharing of goods.

The conflict which, as has been pointed out, runs through the post-1989 battlefield, and which sees confronted, in [Lafay's words](#), "on the one hand, the process of globalization, driven by business and favored by lower transportation and communications costs; on the other, the permanence of nations, tied to their own territory, which seek to organize themselves within regional frameworks defined by ties of geographical or historical proximity."

The New World Order is developing in a space as smooth as the extension of the pineapple, without borders or fixed points, without highs or lows. The triumph of flows over solid roots, of permanent navigation over stable life, of unlimited openness over territories bounded by borders, designs a reality

in which all that is light floats on the surface and what has weight sinks into the abyss. In the words of [Castells](#):

"The space of flows is a structuring practice of elites and dominant interests.... In the space of flows there is no place for resistance to domination. I oppose the space of flows to the spaces of places that are themselves fragmented, segregated and resistant to domination, and therefore to the space of flows."

Thus understood, the class struggle presents itself, in the context of the New World Order, as a gigantomachy that sees the global flows of cosmopolitan openness (commodities, values, information, etc.) as opposed to the "solid" places of national communities, which oppose this fluidification and seek stability and rootedness to protect themselves from the elements of unhappy globalism.

In this enmity between the thalassic element of the flows of capital (of desires, commodities, marketized persons, stock values, etc.) and the telluric dimension of the "places of the self-production of vital worlds," the only possibility of success, for the dominated pole, passes through the reconquest of the State and of politics as a power capable of limiting the insatiable voracity of the self-valorization of value.

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[Featured](#): *Clifftop Walk at Pourville*, by Claude Monet; painted in 1882.

